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Programme planning

Report of the Fifth Committee

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I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 15 September 1998, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-third session the item entitled "Programme planning" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 6th to 8th and 43rd meetings, on 12, 14 and 15 October and 14 December 1998. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/53/SR.6-8 and 43).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Proposed revisions to programme 1, Political affairs; 2, Peacekeeping operations; 3, Peaceful uses of outer space; 5, Policy coordination and sustainable development; 6, Africa: New Agenda for Development; 7, Economic and social information and policy analysis; 8, Development support and management services; 13/Rev.1, International drug control; 14, Economic and social development in Africa; 15, Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific; 16, Economic development in Europe; 17, Economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18, Economic and social development in western Asia; 20, Humanitarian assistance; 23, Public information; 24, Management and central support services; 26, Disarmament; 27, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference services, and 28, Economic and social affairs, to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 (A/53/6 (Progs. 1–3, 5–8, 13/Rev.1, 14–18, 20, 23 and Corr.1, 24 and Corr.1 and 26–28);

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(b) Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session;[1]

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/53/122 and Add.1);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on the proposed revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (A/53/133);

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting within the medium-term plan (A/53/134);

(f) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services entitled "Strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives" (A/53/90);

(g) Letter dated 13 November 1998 from the Chairman of the First Committee addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/41);

(h) Letter dated 3 December 1998 from the President of the General Assembly addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/42);

(i) Letter dated 11 November 1998 from the Vice-Chairperson of the Third Committee addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/43);

(j) Letter dated 5 November 1998 from the Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/44).

4. At the 6th meeting, on 12 October, the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination introduced the report of that Committee (see A/C.5/53/SR.6).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.18

5. At the 43rd meeting, on 14 December, the representative of Uganda and coordinator of the informal consultations on the item introduced a draft resolution entitled "Programme planning" (A/C.5/53/L.18), submitted by the Chairman on the basis of informal consultations.

6. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.18 without a vote (see para. 8).

7. Following the adoption of the draft resolution, statements in explanation of position were made by the representatives of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China), Austria (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union), Poland and the Syrian Arab Republic.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

8. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Programme planning

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 37/234 of 21 December 1982, 38/227 A of 20 December 1983, 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 51/219 of 18 December 1996,

Having examined the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001,[2]

Having considered the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session,[3]

Having also considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the proposed revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation,[4] priority-setting within the medium-term plan[5] and the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997,[6] as well as the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives,[7]

1. *Welcomes* the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session;[3]

2. *Takes note* of the appreciable efforts made at the thirty-eighth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination to improve the working methods and procedures of the Committee within the framework of its mandate;

3. *Reaffirms* the role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination as the main subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for planning, programming and coordination;

4. *Takes note* of the conclusions and recommendations contained in part one, chapter V, of the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session and looks forward to their implementation;

I

Medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001

1. *Reaffirms* regulation 4.2 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure full compliance with this regulation;

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[2] A/53/6 (Progs. 1–3, 5–8, 13/Rev.1, 14–18, 20, 23 and Corr.1, 24 and Corr.1 and 26–28).

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16).

[4] A/53/133.

[5] A/53/134.

[6] A/53/122 and Add.1.

[7] A/53/90.

2. *Adopts* the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 submitted by the Secretary-General,[2] as amended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination;[8]

3. *Emphasizes* the importance of the consultative process with Member States;

4. *Also emphasizes* the importance of the contribution of the sectoral, regional and central intergovernmental bodies, in particular the Main Committees of the General Assembly, in reviewing and improving the quality of the medium-term plan and its revisions;

5. *Regrets* that revisions to some programmes of the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 were not reviewed by the relevant intergovernmental bodies;

6. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to take all appropriate measures, including ad hoc measures, and to submit proposals, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination, to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, so as to enable the Main Committees of the General Assembly, as well as the sectoral, functional and regional bodies, effectively to review the relevant portions of the medium-term plan or its revisions, with a view to facilitating their consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a preliminary report, in accordance with the existing mandates of the General Assembly, on possible arrangements for post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction, as well as on the transition from relief to development, maintaining the distinct nature of both activities, for consideration by the relevant Main Committees of the General Assembly and intergovernmental bodies;

II

Priorities

1. *Stresses* the importance of priority-setting as an integral part of the planning, programming and budgeting process;

2. *Decides* that priorities shall continue to be established in the medium-term plan, which is the principal policy directive of the United Nations, and shall guide the allocation of resources in subsequent programme budgets through the mechanisms provided for in General Assembly resolution 41/213;

3. *Also decides* that priorities contained in the budget outline shall be in conformity with the priorities in the medium-term plan;

4. *Emphasizes* that priorities, once established by the General Assembly, cannot be changed or altered unless it so decides;

[8] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16), part one, chap. II.B, and part two, chap. III.A.

III

Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation

1. *Approves* the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation;[9]

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to prepare revisions to the relevant rules and to bring them to the attention of the General Assembly through the Committee for Programme and Coordination before promulgation;

IV

New narratives of the programme budget

Approves the new programme narratives for section 7A, Economic and social affairs[10] and section 26, Public information,[11] subject to the modifications recommended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination[12] and also to the provisions of the present resolution;

V

Programme performance

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997[6] and the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination thereon, subject to the provisions below;

2. *Notes with concern* the late submission of the programme performance report, and urges the Secretary-General to submit the report in future to all Member States by the end of the first quarter following completion of the biennial budget period, in accordance with regulation 6.3 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation;

3. *Recalls* section II, paragraph 13, of its resolution 50/214 of 23 December 1995, in which it decided to keep the vacancy rate at 6.4 per cent during the biennium 1996–1997, and, in this context, expresses its deep concern at the high vacancy rate and its adverse impact in some areas of programme delivery;

4. *Reaffirms* that the vacancy rate is a tool for budgetary calculations and should not be used to achieve budgetary savings;

5. *Deeply regrets* the use of vacant posts for consultancies and short-term appointments during the biennium 1996–1997;

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[9] Ibid., part two, para. 52.

[10] E/AC.51/1998/6 (Sect. 7A) and Corr.1.

[11] E/AC.51/1998/6 (Sect. 26).

[12] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16), part one, paras. 192 and 208.

6. *Notes with appreciation* that the United Nations, in particular the regional commissions, provided development-related advisory and technical support to Member States during the biennium 1996–1997, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to extend such services during the current biennium, in accordance with existing mandates;

7. *Reaffirms* the right of Member States to seek the support and assistance of the United Nations, individually and collectively, in the regional and subregional context, in their efforts to promote developmental activities;

8. *Emphasizes* the need for greater interaction between the regional commissions and respective regional organizations;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the regional commissions provide technical assistance to Member States, including through their respective regional organizations;

10. *Notes* the efforts made to improve the quality of the report and to review performance within the context of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, and stresses that in future performance reports more emphasis should be placed upon qualitative analysis to reflect achievements in implementing programme activities;

11. *Reaffirms* regulation 4.1 of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, and reiterates that resources should be utilized strictly for the purposes approved by the General Assembly;

12. *Notes with concern* that some of the findings contained in the programme performance report for the biennium 1996–1997 are ambiguous and contradictory, and therefore some of the conclusions remain vague and general in nature;

13. *Also notes with concern* that the programme performance report for the biennium 1996–1997, in some instances, commented on actions which did not conform with the resolutions of the General Assembly;

14. *Further notes with concern* that some resources were redeployed to fund activities that had not been approved in the programme budget for the biennium 1996–1997, while a number of mandated programmes and activities, particularly in priority areas, were postponed, curtailed or cancelled;

15. *Requests* the Secretary General, in the light of paragraph 57 of the programme performance report for the biennium 1996–1997,[13] to report with clear evidence on the impact of the reform of the Organization and restructuring of the Secretariat on programme delivery during the biennium 1998–1999 in the context of the report on the programme performance of the United Nations for that biennium;

16. *Notes* the finding in the programme performance report for the biennium 1996–1997 that programme managers, in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly and the relevant regulations and rules, have managed to minimize the adverse effect of financial constraints and achieved high rates of implementation in some areas;

17. *Recognizes* the need for effective systems at the intergovernmental and departmental levels to ensure that activities correspond to the mandates reflected in the medium-term plan and programme budgets, as well as the need to monitor and evaluate the quality of performance;

18. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit proposals for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-ninth session on ways in which

[13] A/53/122.

the full implementation and the quality of mandated programmes and activities could be ensured and could be better assessed by and reported to Member States;

19. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to provide information on the reasons for the further postponement of the delivery of outputs to the biennium 1998–1999 and the opinion of relevant intergovernmental bodies on the proposal by the Secretary-General to delete fifty-seven outputs carried over from the biennium 1994–1995, for consideration at its current session;

20. *Notes* that the proposals requested in paragraph 50 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 51/241 of 31 July 1997 have not been submitted, and, in this context, reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to enhance the role and participation of all relevant departments, in particular the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, in the preparation of future programme performance reports;

VI

Evaluation

1. *Stresses* the importance and necessity of further improving evaluation and integrating it into the cycle of programme planning, budgeting and monitoring with a view to improving and strengthening programme formulation and implementation;

2. *Also stresses* that the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation provide a sound basis for effective monitoring and evaluation if implemented in all parts of the Organization;

3. *Approves* the addition of the programmes on policy coordination and sustainable development and on population to the schedule of in-depth evaluations to be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-first session;

4. *Endorses* the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination[14] on the in-depth evaluations of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme and the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme and on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its thirty-fifth session on the evaluation of peacekeeping operations: start-up phase;[15]

5. *Decides* to forward to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its thirty-fifth session on the evaluation of the programme on environment;[16]

6. *Emphasizes* that guidelines on programme monitoring and evaluation should be in conformity with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation;

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[14] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16), part one, paras. 225–230, 239–241 and 250–253.

[15] E/AC.51/1998/2 and Corr.1, E/AC.51/1998/3 and E/AC.51/1998/4 and Corr.1.

[16] E/AC.51/1998/5 and Corr.1.

VII

Other conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

Endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination[17] regarding the annual overview report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination for 1997,[18] the progress report on the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996–2001,[19] and the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.[20]

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[17] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/53/16), part one, paras. 285–288, 301–310 and 323–333.

[18] E/1998/21.

[19] E/CN.6/1998/3.

[20] E/AC.51/1998/7.